

RC131  
865P

PROVIDENCE, R.I.

Measures proposed for the  
prevention of Asiatic cholera  
in the City of Providence; a  
report to the Board of Aldermen,  
by Edwin M. Snow. 1865.

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MEASURES PROPOSED  
FOR THE PREVENTION  
OF  
ASIATIC CHOLERA,  
IN THE  
CITY OF PROVIDENCE,  
w  
NOVEMBER 6, 1865.

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1865-6.]

CITY DOCUMENT.

[No. 8.]

MEASURES PROPOSED  
FOR THE PREVENTION  
OF  
ASIATIC CHOLERA  
IN THE  
CITY OF PROVIDENCE;  
A REPORT TO THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN,  
BY  
EDWIN M. SNOW, M. D.,  
SUPERINTENDENT OF HEALTH.



PROVIDENCE:  
PROVIDENCE PRESS COMPANY.  
1865.



CITY OF PROVIDENCE.

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IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, Nov. 6, 1865.

Read, whereupon it is—

*Ordered*, that the same be received and printed in book form for the use of the City Council.

SAMUEL W. BROWN, City Clerk.

RC131  
865P



## PREVENTION OF ASIATIC CHOLERA.

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*To the Hon. the Board of Aldermen*

*of the City of Providence :*

GENTLEMEN:—The communication which I sent to your Board a few weeks since, was especially intended as a report upon sundry documents which had been referred to me, and the subject of the measures necessary to prevent the cholera in this city, was only incidentally and briefly alluded to.

At the time of writing that report, we had not, as I thought, any very positive evidence that the cholera would reach this country next year. It seemed, therefore, to be a wise policy, in the present excited state of the public mind, to refrain from presenting any extended statement of the necessary preventive measures, until we had more positive evidence that they would be needed. I thought, and still think, that the continual discussion of the subject in the newspapers ; the advocacy of the doctrine of the contagion of cholera ; the establishment of rigid quarantines in our sea ports ; and the publication of the legion of remedies as cures or preventives of the disease, do exert a positively injurious effect upon the public, and render the people actually more susceptible of the disease, while they do no good to any one, and never have one particle of effect as preventives or cures. It is a well established fact that when the cholera is present in a community, fear does exert a positive and direct

influence, and actually produces the disease in individuals, who, without fear, would not have it. Nothing should be done, then, which will increase the public excitement; but every effort should be made to allay excitement, to calm fear, and to enable the people to look at the subject in a rational manner.

Since the report referred to, was written, intelligence has been received that a considerable number of cases of cholera has appeared in England and France, and this fact, judging from past experience, seems to render it probable that we shall have the disease in this country next year. If there are any doubts upon this point, they will probably be dispelled by the appearance of cholera, within a few weeks, on board emigrant vessels bound from Europe to this country. The season is so far advanced that the disease cannot prevail in this city, nor to any great extent, in this country, before the spring of next year.

If we may form an opinion from former visitations of cholera in this country, we may expect, in a short time, to hear that vessels from Europe have the disease on board, and lose many passengers, though the vessels may be free from the disease before reaching our shores. We shall then expect to hear of some undoubted cases of the disease in New York city, and in our Southern cities, there may be a considerable number of deaths. In January, 1849, there were thirty deaths from cholera, in one week, in New Orleans, and in December, 1853, there were two hundred and fourteen deaths there, from the disease, in one week.

After the winter is fairly set in we shall hear very little of the disease, though it may continue, to some extent, in New York, and in our more Southern cities. On the opening of spring, the cholera will appear simultaneously in all our cities, and will increase; its prevalence and virulence depending upon the heat of the weather, and the amount of filth and impure air which it finds in them.

In this city, if nothing is done to prevent it, we may expect a few cases in May and June; but it will not become prevalent here before the middle of July.

It will be seen that we have abundant time for preparation. Knowing this fact, and with the view of avoiding all unnecessary excitement, I had intended to defer to a much later period, the

preparation of this report. But as it now seems to be probable that the cholera will visit us next year, and as, thanks to the combined efforts of the myriad newspaper press, the unnecessary excitement and alarm must come, I have concluded that it is best, at this time, to report to your Board more particularly and definitely the measures I would propose, and which seem to me to be absolutely necessary to prevent the prevalence of cholera in this city. I have come to this conclusion the more willingly from the confident expectation that when the people know precisely what we have the power to do, and what we propose to do, and when we propose to do it, they will feel satisfied that, so far as this city is concerned, there is no cause for alarm.

Permit me to say that the measures proposed are no idle theories and speculations. The cholera is a preventable disease; we know all about its local causes, and can name and define them specifically. These local causes can, to a very great extent, be removed, and if removed, it is absolutely impossible for the disease to become generally prevalent. The subject is perfectly plain and simple, and my object in this communication, is to make such a definite application of it to the local circumstances and condition of the city of Providence, that all can understand it.

*First*, in relation to the powers we possess for the removal of nuisances.

I stated in my former communication that the powers of the Board of Health, and of the Superintendent of Health, under existing laws, were ample to do all that is necessary to be done for the removal of all the *ordinary* causes of this disease. I referred, in this statement, to an Act of the General Assembly of this State, which was prepared with special reference to circumstances like those in which we find ourselves at the present time.

There has been, heretofore, no special necessity for using the powers granted in this Act, and it is probable that your Board and the people generally, are not aware of its provisions, or of its existence. I will, therefore, quote the Act in full, and would call your attention, particularly, to the third, fourth, and fifth sections of it. You will perceive that it is precisely what is needed at the present time. It is as follows:

## [STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS.]

## CHAPTER 281.

Passed March 5, 1858.

An Act in amendment of, and in addition to, Title XIV, Chapter 74, of the Revised Statutes—of Regulations for the Prevention of Infectious and Contagious Diseases.

*It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows :*

SECTION 1. If any vegetable or fruit which shall be decayed, or any decayed, diseased, or unwholesome meat, fish, or other provisions, shall be in the possession of any person, or shall be sold, or offered or exposed for sale, within the city of Providence, the same shall be forfeited; and the Board of Aldermen are authorized and empowered to make all rules and regulations for the immediate seizure and destruction of the same, by such officer as they may appoint for that purpose.

SEC. 2. Any person knowingly and willfully selling, or offering or exposing for sale, within the city of Providence, any of the articles declared to be forfeited by the preceding section, shall also forfeit and pay a penalty of not less than ten, nor more than twenty dollars, for each offence, to be recovered to and for the use of the city, by complaint and warrant before the police court of said city.

SEC. 3. Whenever there shall exist in or upon any building or premises within the city of Providence, owned or occupied by any person, any dirt, offal, animal or vegetable matter, or other filth, which, in the opinion of the Superintendent of Health, is dangerous to the health of the occupants, or to the public health, it shall be lawful for the Board of Aldermen of said city to issue an order in writing, directed to the owner or occupant of such building or premises, directing him to remove such dirt or filth immediately, and to cleanse such building or premises by the use of whitewash or other disinfectants, in such manner as in said order shall be prescribed.

SEC. 4. In case the owner or occupant to whom such order shall be directed, shall neglect or refuse to comply therewith within twenty four hours after the service thereof upon him, such owner or occupant shall forfeit and pay to and for the use of the city, a penalty of not less than five, nor more than twenty dollars, for each subsequent twenty-four hours during which he shall neglect, or refuse to comply therewith, to be recovered by complaint and warrant before the Police Court of said city; and the Superintendent of Health is hereby authorized to go on and remove such dirt, offal, animal or vegetable matter, or other filth, and to cleanse such building or premises in the manner prescribed in the said order; and the City Treasurer shall pay the expense of such removal and cleansing, and the owner and occupant of such building or premises shall be severally liable for the same, which shall be collected from such owner or occupant by suit in the name of the City Treasurer, and for the use of the city of Providence, before any court of competent jurisdiction.

SEC. 5. Whenever a case of infectious or contagious disease exists in any tenement, cellar, or building used as a dwelling place within the city of Providence, and any dirt, offal, animal, or vegetable matter, or other filth exists thereon, which, in the opinion of the Superintendent of Health, is prejudicial to the health of the inmates, or to the public health, the Superintendent of Health is hereby authorized to issue the order provided for in section 3 of this act, and in case of refusal or neglect on the part of the owner or occupant to remove such filth and cleanse such premises within twelve hours after the service upon him of such order, to go on and remove the same, and cleanse and disinfect such premises, in such manner as he shall deem proper; and the City Treasurer shall pay the expense of the same, and the owner and occupant of such premises shall be severally liable therefor, and the same shall be recoverable from such owner or occupant, by an action in the name of the City Treasurer, to the use of the city of Providence, before any court of competent jurisdiction.

SEC. 6. Whenever, in the opinion of the Superintendent of Health, the presence of any vessel or hulk in any particular locality within the city of Provi-

dence, whether the same be used for navigation or otherwise, shall be prejudicial to the public health, it shall be lawful for the Board of Aldermen to issue an order in writing directed to the owner, master, or occupant of such vessel or hulk, ordering him to remove the same immediately to such place as shall be designated in the said order, and to cleanse such vessel or hulk, in such manner as shall be in such order prescribed.

SEC. 7. In case the owner, master, or occupant of such vessel or hulk shall neglect or refuse to remove and cleanse the same within twenty-four hours after such order shall have been served upon him, such owner, master, or occupant shall forfeit and pay, to and for the use of the city, a penalty of not less than ten nor more than twenty dollars for each subsequent twenty-four hours during which he shall neglect or refuse so to comply therewith; and the Superintendent of Health is hereby authorized to remove and cleanse the same; and the expense of such removal and cleansing shall be paid by the City Treasurer, and shall be recovered from the owner, master, or occupant of such vessel or hulk, by suit, in the name of the City Treasurer, to the use of the city of Providence, before any court of competent jurisdiction; and the amount of any judgment so recovered, shall be a lien upon such vessel or hulk until paid.

SEC. 8. The city sergeant of the city of Providence, or either of the police constables of said city, is hereby authorized to make service of the orders provided for in sections 3, 5 and 6 of this act, and to make return, in writing, to the authority which may have issued the same.

SEC. 9. No act, or part of an act, the provisions of which are not inconsistent with the provisions of this act, shall be repealed hereby, but the same shall be and remain in full force and vigor; but any act or part of an act inconsistent herewith, is hereby repealed.

It will be seen that the provisions of this Act are sufficient for the speedy and effectual removal of all the ordinary sources of cholera, in and about houses and premises of private individuals. Besides this, the Board of Health has the power to remove the occupants from tenements which are unfit for habitation, and to close them up until they are made satisfactory. We have also the power to compel the construction of suitable privy vaults, cess pools, and sink drains for each dwelling house.

Though these powers are ample, it has not been found necessary to use them, to any great extent, as the people have generally been found ready to co-operate in the removal of nuisances, without any process of law. Should the cholera visit us, however, every thing will depend upon the most speedy and thorough action, and it will, probably, be found necessary to use these powers freely.

Such being the powers we have at our command, we will now proceed to consider what is necessary to be done. It is evident to all that the removal of filth from yards, the removal of the contents of privy vaults, and cess-pools, the cleansing of cellars, the whitewashing of rooms, and other similar measures, at the



present time, though at all times important, would be of no special utility for the prevention of cholera next summer. If done now, it would be just as necessary to repeat the work next spring, and besides, a considerable portion of this work is usually done by the owners and occupants of houses during the winter. There is other work about tenement houses, such as the repair of vaults, cess-pools, sink drains, and sink spouts, and the general repair and putting in order of these buildings, which requires time, and which is of great importance with reference to the prevention of cholera. This can be done during the winter.

The measures I propose, then, for the prevention of cholera in this city, are as follows :

*First.* To send, within a short time, circulars to the individual owners of tenement houses in certain portions of the city, calling their attention to the subject, pointing out what is needed to be done on their estates, and stating generally and particularly what must be done by them, or by the city, before next summer.

*Second.* I propose, during the winter, to look up and examine those tenements in the city which are unfit for habitation, and report to your Board the action necessary to remove the occupants and shut up the tenements. I am happy to know that the number of tenements of this class in Providence, is comparatively small. I intend, also, at the same time, to report those tenements which are not provided with suitable vaults and drains, as required by law.

*Third.* In the month of May next, I propose to have a thorough and systematic visitation and inspection of every house and yard in every section of the city where there is any danger that the cholera might prevail. Each house will be thoroughly examined from the cellar to the attic, and each yard in every part, and a written report will be made showing the exact condition of each house. A notice will then be served, if ordered by your Board, upon the owner of each house, notifying him, in accordance with the provisions of the law, precisely and particularly what must be done upon his premises, within a given number of hours after the notice is served upon him.

In the meantime, I would have an organized corps of scavengers, night-soil men, and whitewashers, ready for service at any

moment. If the owner of any estate fails to do everything necessary to be done, within the time specified in his notice, it will be done at once on the expiration of the time, and will be done thoroughly, in accordance with the provisions of the law already quoted.

Upon some of the estates in the localities which will need special attention, there will be found large heaps of ashes and rubbish saturated with slops and every description of filth: this must be thoroughly removed and the ground must be strewed with slacked lime. It will be found that the privies are filthy, the doors broken down, and the vaults uncovered, and overflowing: the filth must be thoroughly removed, the vaults repaired and covered, and lime, chloride of lime, and other disinfectants must be freely used. It will be found that the wooden sink spouts are rotten, the sink drains stopped up, the cesspools overflowing, and the sides of the house, and the ground greasy and wet with slop water and other liquid filth, which, often, has found a passage into the cellar: this great nuisance must all be thoroughly removed, and its recurrence effectually prevented. It will be found that the cellars, sometimes, are not used; but are half filled with stagnant water, slop water, and filth of every description, absolutely certain to produce cholera and death if allowed to remain: such cellars must be thoroughly cleaned and strewed with lime, and if the water cannot be kept out of them, they must be filled up. In these houses it will be found that every room is almost black with smoke, and with cholera and fever-producing filth: in such cases every room must be cleaned, and the walls and ceiling must be thoroughly whitewashed with fresh slacked lime.

The foregoing is a description of some of the worst cases which will be found. I am glad to know that such cases can be found only in limited number, and in limited portions of the city of Providence. But the description itself will show the general character of the work which is to be done if we would prevent cholera. In such and in similar houses, and in the localities where such houses are permitted to exist, will be found ninety-nine one-hundredths of all the cholera we shall have in the city. I am confident that the subject is so well understood and appre-



ciated, by our citizens generally, that, in two-thirds of the territory of the city, there will not be a single case of cholera, except from gross excess, or imprudence on the part of individuals. In such cases, as cholera is not contagious, there is no danger to the public, but only to the individuals themselves.

*Fourth.* The work described under the preceding head, must be thoroughly done in the month of May. After that time, it will be necessary, through the summer, to keep up a constant, watchful care of certain localities, and in a limited number of cases, it will be necessary to repeat the work of purification, again and again.

*Fifth.* There are some stables, and offensive manufactories in the city which will need attention, though the number is very small. There are also a very few places where there is stagnant and filthy water at times. One of the worst of these is in the neighborhood of Webster and Ashburton streets, lying mostly beyond the city limits, in North Providence. This, and some other nuisances near the city, will need the co-operation of the authorities of the neighboring towns for their removal.

*Sixth.* By the faithful execution of the measures already named, we may confidently expect that all danger of a general prevalence of the disease, in this city, will be removed, and the greater portion of the cases of cholera, which would otherwise occur, will be prevented. But, in the month of July, the presence of the atmospheric cause of cholera, which no human power can prevent, will cause a greater tendency than usual to the ordinary bowel complaints of the season. These will yield to the ordinary remedies, and will furnish no occasion for alarm among the people.

If the weather is favorable for the disease, and if the foul canal basin, the offensive sewers, the filthy streets, and the hogs east of Ives street, and near the city in North and South Providence, are permitted to remain, as at present, this tendency to bowel complaints will be greatly increased, and we may expect that in certain localities some actual cases of cholera will appear, and we shall be compelled to recognize the existence of the disease in the city.

At this point a new class of duties will devolve upon us. The

cholera is so absolutely preventable, that even when it exists in a community, and many persons are in danger of it; and even when many persons are actually suffering from the first stages of the disease, the epidemic may be cut short, and its progress may be completely checked by the vigorous use of the proper measures.

The dangerous stage of cholera in any individual is, almost without exception, preceded for several hours at least, and often for some days, by a *painless* diarrhœa. This diarrhœa is easily and completely checked by simple remedies, and if checked, the cholera is practically cured. But if the diarrhœa is allowed to go on until the cramps, and the stage of collapse appear, remedies are almost entirely useless. Here lies the chief difficulty in the ordinary treatment of cholera by physicians. In nine cases out of ten they are not called to see the patient until he is in the stage of collapse. For patients in this stage of cholera, no cure has ever been found, and from the nature of the case, we fear none ever can be found: a few will recover; but the greater number will die, with or without medicine. But medicine will almost certainly cure the diarrhœa which precedes this stage of collapse, and the only difficulty is in the application of the remedy to the numerous individuals in a community who may need it. It is found that individuals suffering from this preliminary stage of cholera, are strangely apathetic upon the subject. The diarrhœa seems to give them relief; they do not realize their danger, and will not, voluntarily, apply for the needed remedies. I propose, then, to take the necessary measures to have the people, and particularly the class of people most liable to the disease, fully informed upon this point, so that no one shall be ignorant of the danger from neglect of this painless diarrhœa. If it is found necessary, I propose to bring this subject directly and practically to the knowledge of the people, in certain localities, by an organized medical house-to-house visitation, by which enquiries will be made, and the necessary remedies will be given to those who need them.

In the Reports of the English Board of Health, I have full accounts of many instances in England, where epidemics of cholera have been completely cut short, and the mortality has

been entirely checked, in a few days, by this house to house visitation.

Such are the measures proposed for the prevention of cholera in this city. By their faithful execution, and by the co-operation of the city government in the removal of the nuisances mentioned in my former report, I confidently expect that a large portion of the cases of cholera will be prevented, that there will be no general epidemic of the disease here, and that all cause for excitement and alarm on the part of our citizens will be entirely removed.

I do not propose to flood the city with handbills, nor to issue daily bulletins, nor to quarantine vessels and railroad cars from New York, (which we ought to do immediately, if quarantines were of any value in this disease,) nor to make any other similar demonstrations of a public character, which are utterly useless for preventing or delaying the appearance of cholera, but which do exert a positive influence in rendering the people liable to the disease when it comes.

It was a wise and philosophic measure of Carlyle, who, when the cholera was in his neighborhood, assembled his household, gave them clear and rational information upon the subject, and forbade them, thenceforth, to mention cholera in his house.

If all our cities would faithfully carry into effect the well known internal sanitary measures which, and which only, will prevent the disease; and if the newspapers and the people would not mention cholera for the next six months, we should have very little of it in this country.

When, however, the disease is in a place, any attempt at concealment is useless, and is the worst possible policy. The attempt to keep the fact secret increases the fears of the people, and rumor makes every case of diarrhœa a bad case of cholera, and every case of cholera is increased to a hundred. If any cases occur in this city, I propose, in every instance, to give the exact particulars to the public immediately. By so doing the mountain will be reduced to a mole-hill; the people will see the relation of the causes and the effect; and all unnecessary excitement and alarm will be prevented.

It will be seen that the measures proposed will require some assistance and co-operation from the Board of Health. All that I would ask for, at the present time, is that three or four men may be furnished, for a few days, either by special appointment, or by detail from the police force, to assist in obtaining information in relation to the condition of the houses and premises in certain localities, and to serve the notices of their condition upon their owners.

Respectfully,

EDWIN M. SNOW, M. D.,

*Superintendent of Health.*

PROVIDENCE, November 6, 1865.

NOTE.—Since the greater portion of this paper was written, intelligence has been received of the arrival in New York, of a vessel from Europe with cholera on board. This is a few days earlier than I expected. The fact, however, furnishes no occasion for alarm, nor does it render the slightest change necessary in the measures proposed. It only renders it more certain that the disease will be in this country next year, and thus furnishes additional evidence of the necessity and importance of these measures.

Other vessels will undoubtedly arrive in New York, in a short time, with more cases on board, and before the first of January there will be some cases in that city, possibly some may come from that city to this; but it is impossible for the disease to prevail, to any extent, before the warm weather of next year.

On the next page will be found the statistics of cholera in Providence.

**CHOLERA IN PROVIDENCE.**

The following are the statistics of Asiatic Cholera in Providence, at the three periods, when it has appeared here.

	1832.	1849.	1854.
First death from Cholera.....	Aug. 1	May 27	May 16
Last death from Cholera....	Oct. 9	Nov. 16	Sept. 29
Number of days from first to last.....	69	173	137
Estimated cases of the disease.....	36	225	318
Whole number of deaths from Cholera..	25	150	159
Number of deaths in May.....		1	9
“ “ “ June.....		4	8
“ of deaths from July 1st to 20th....		1	0
“ “ “ “ 20th to 31st.....		15	14
Deaths for week ending August 7th, . . .		20	24
“ “ “ “ 14th. . . . .		26	39
“ “ “ “ 21st.....		17	20
“ “ “ “ 28th.. . . .		16	19
“ “ “ September 4th.....		18	14
“ “ “ “ 11th.....		7	5
“ “ “ “ 18th.....		10	3
“ “ “ “ 25th.....		5	3
“ from Sept. 26th to 30th, inclusive.....		3	1
“ in October.....		3	0
“ in November.....		4	0
Whole number of deaths.....	25	150	159
<i>Sex</i> .....Males .....		80	86
Females .....		70	73
<i>Color</i> .....Whites.....		139	159
Colored.....		11	0
<i>Condition</i> .Single.....		63	62
Married.....		76	82
Widows and widowers.....		11	15
<i>Parentage</i> .American.....		51	14
Foreign.....		99	140
Unknown.....		0	5
<i>Locality</i> ..East side.....		94	140
West side.....		56	19
<i>Ages</i> ...Under 5 years .....		14	20
5 and under 10.....		6	12
10 “ 20.....		4	6
20 “ 30.....		31	32
30 “ 40.....		34	34
40 “ 50.....		27	22
50 “ 60.....		16	14
60 “ 70.....		14	9
70 “ 80.. . . .		4	9
Age not given.....		0	1

The average age of all who died in 1849, was 34 years, 3 months; in 1854, it was 32 years, 3 months.

The whole number of cases and deaths, in 1832, is correct; but the particulars cannot be obtained.

[Form used in enforcing the Law given on page 6.]

## CITY OF PROVIDENCE, SC.

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, — 1865.

To

Owner of the estate situated at

in said city :


Whereas it appears to said Board of Aldermen that there exists in the house and yard upon said premises owned by you, certain filth, and causes of disease, which in the opinion of the Superintendent of Health of said city, are dangerous to the health of the occupants of said premises, and to the public health ; therefore you are hereby directed by said Board of Aldermen to cleanse said premises immediately,

By removing all filth from the cellar, and sprinkling lime in it ; by cleansing and repairing the sink spouts and drains, and putting in disinfectants so as to remove the present offensive smell from them ; by thoroughly whitewashing with fresh slacked lime every room in the house ; by removing all ashes, rubbish, and other filth from every part of the premises ; and by removing thoroughly the contents of the privy vault and cesspool.

If this order is not complied with, and said premises cleansed as above directed, within twenty-four hours after the service of this notice, the same will be done by the Superintendent of Health, at your expense, according to law.

By order of the Board of Aldermen :

Clerk.

 *The particulars of the work to be done are changed, according to the circumstances of each case.*











## Date Due

<del>Dec 16 '57</del>			

Demco 293-5

Syracuse, N. Y.  
Stockton, Calif.

Accession no.

15583

Author

Providence. Board  
of health.

Measures proposed ...

Call no. 1865.

~~10th Cent~~

